

### What does it mean to Responsible?

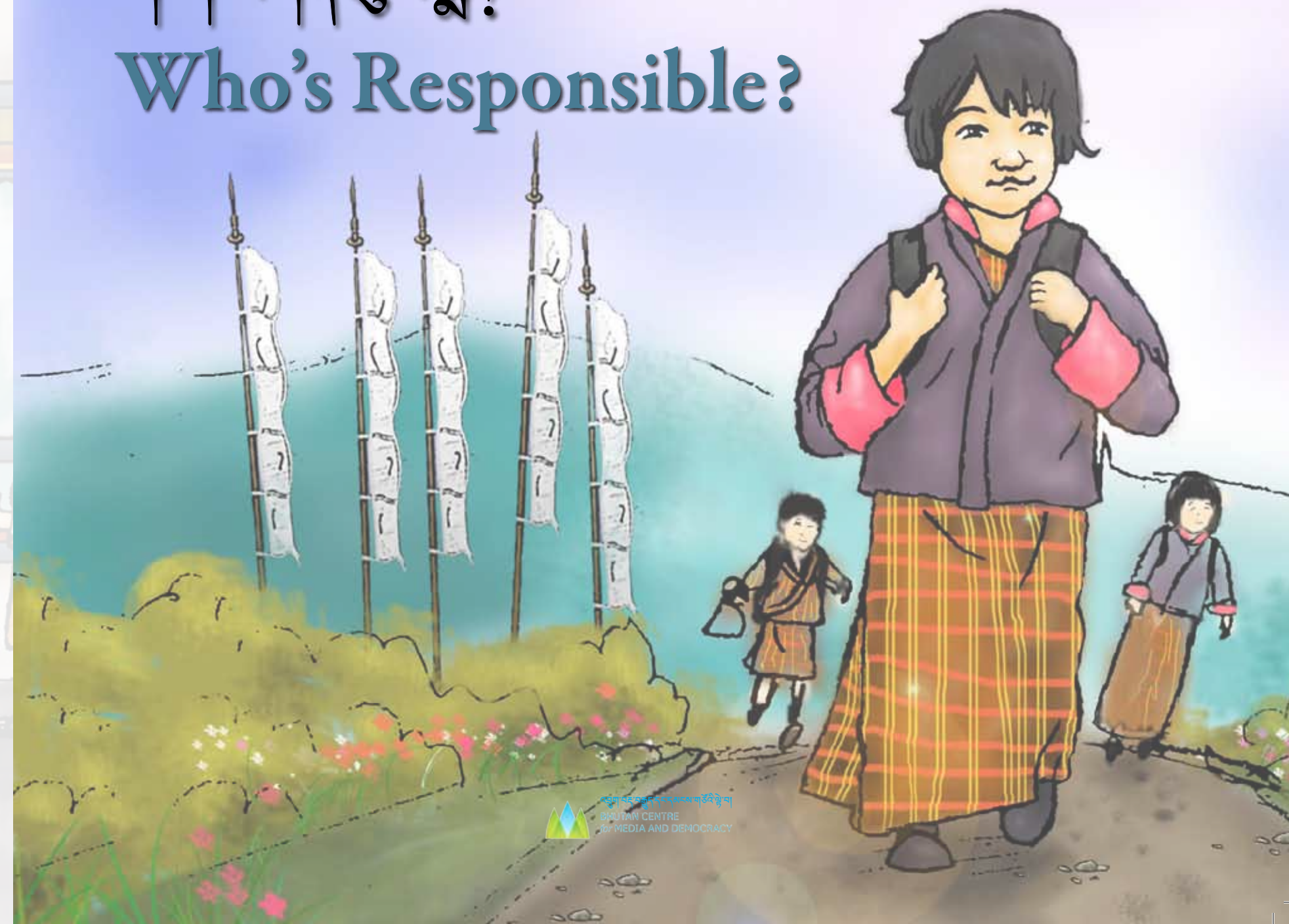
Yuden and her friends learn about being responsible at home and in school.

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# ག་གི་འགན་ཁུར་སྟོན་?

## Who's Responsible?



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BHUTAN CENTRE  
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY



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Story line by Siok Sian Pek- Dorji

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## Who's Responsible?



Illustrated by Chand Kumar Bhattarai, VAST



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## I'd rather go out to play

"And where do you think you're going?" asked Ama.

Yuden knew that tone of voice. When her mother sounded like that, she meant it.

"Out to play," she said, innocently.

"Oh no you're not," said Ama, crossing her arms. "I have to take Apa's lunch out to the field, and I can't take Zangmo with me. She's been coughing all morning," (here, Yuden's baby sister sneezed, as if to make a point) "and I don't want her out in the cold wind."

"But, Ama..." Yuden started to protest.

"And it's your turn to feed the calf. You know we have to keep it away from its mother. Last time it drank so much milk we didn't even have enough for our tea... and look after your sister nicely, she's your responsibility\* today. Oh, and also remember to..."

While she was rattling off instructions, Ama was bustling around, packing ema datsi into a small wooden container, picking things up, putting things away, tidying the room.

Yuden looked longingly out of the door. The sun was sharp and bright. From the doorstep, you could see across the tops of the village, across the whole of Trashiyangtse, it seemed, to the green woods and the mountains in the distance. It looked so pretty and inviting. And it wasn't even that cold...

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\* Responsibility: A responsibility is a duty. It is something you ought to do.

Ama did one final whirl around the room, picked up little Zangmo, plonked her in Yuden's arms and strode out the door, the ema datsi wrapped in a cloth swinging from her hand. At the bottom of the hill, she turned and waved at her two daughters. "Be good!" she called. "Yuden, be responsible, okay?"

Yuden turned back to the room. "Come on then, Cheychey," she sighed. She tied her little sister to her back and trudged out to the shed. Zangmo seemed very happy to be out, gurgling away happily and occasionally sneezing into Yuden's ear. It was all very well for Cheychey, thought Yuden, glumly. She was just two years old, and seemed pretty happy wherever you put her.

Just then she heard her friends calling her name.

"Yuden! Yuuuuden!"

She rushed outside.

Pema's eyes were shining. "Look! Dawa's got a new skipping rope!"

Dawa held it up shyly.

Sonam ran over, tickled Zangmo briefly under the chin, and grabbed Yuden's hand. "Come on! What are you waiting for?"

"I can't," mumbled Yuden. "I have to stay home to look after Cheychey."

"Bring her too!" the other children chorused.

"Ama said she's got a cold and..."

"She's fine!"

"It's not that cold."

"Just for a little while."

Well, in the face of all that, Yuden's resolve\*\* crumbled into a little heap. "Okay!" she shouted and rushed after her friends and down the hill, her little sister bumping along happily on her back.

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\*\* Resolve: determination, when you've made up your mind to do something, no matter what.









# Catching A Cold

The next morning, Yuden was woken up by her father.

“Up you get, sleepyhead. You’ll be late for school.” He swept her blanket off, and swirled it around him like a cape.

The cold air rushed in, and Yuden quickly got out of bed and struggled into her clothes. It was the first day back at school after the winter holidays and she was excited. She had such fun with her friends yesterday. She was really looking forward to seeing them all again at school. Maybe Dawa would bring her skipping rope with her...

She grabbed some rice and ezay and started to wolf it down.

“You’ll get hiccups,” warned her mother, who was trying to get Zangmo to eat. Zangmo was sniffing and unhappy and kept twisting her face away from the spoon. “I don’t know what’s the matter with Cheyche today,” she muttered. “Gyetse, could please get the milk? The tea’s ready.”

Apa went out but returned a minute later looking puzzled.

“I only managed to get a drop,” he said holding out the little jug for Ama to see. “What’s wrong with that cow, I wonder?” Ama turned to her elder daughter with narrowed eyes.

“Yuden, you did remember to keep the calf tethered away from its mother like I told you yesterday, didn’t you?”

“Ye...es,” said Yuden, suddenly very interested in her food.

“My little trooper,” said her father, ruffling her hair. “Ama told me how responsible you were yesterday, staying back to look after Zangmo while we were out. You’re really getting to be a grown-up girl!”

Yuden quickly bent down to tie her shoelaces so her Apa couldn’t see her red face.

Then Zangmo suddenly sneezed – a huge sneeze – that startled her so much that she started to cry! Yuden decided that this would be a very good time to disappear.

“Bye!” she cried, grabbing her schoolbag, stuffing the last of the breakfast in her mouth, and dashing out of the door.

# First Day at School

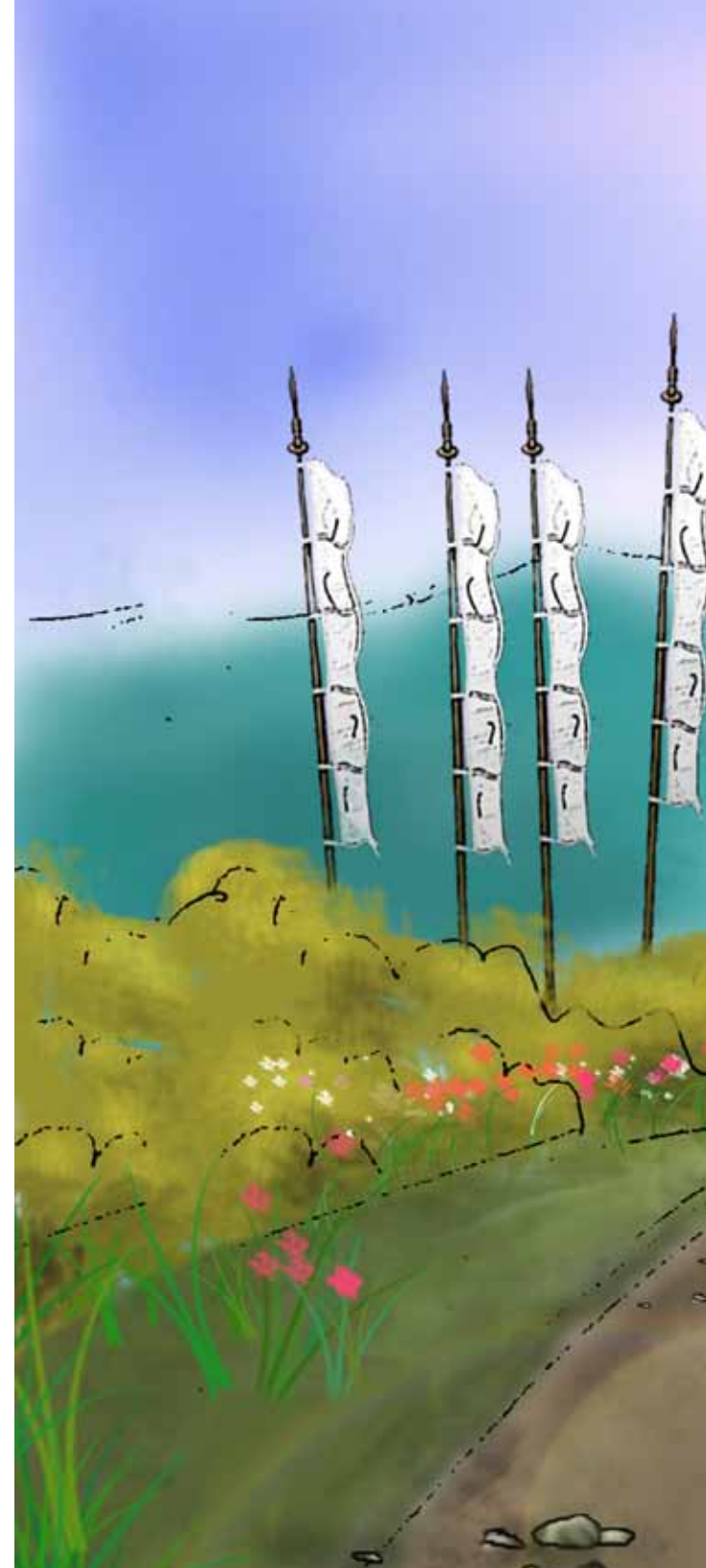
Yangtse community school sat on the top of a hillock. It was a pretty little school with 86 students and three classrooms. Yuden had been at this school since she was 6 years old, and in a few years' time, Zangmo would be there too.

Yuden spotted Dawa and Tshering in the playground and ran over to them. The three of them joined the other kids as they made their way in to their new classroom. Well, it was new to them, but it was quite old. In fact, the building was looking like it really needed a coat of paint. There was a broken plank at the bottom of their classroom door and a chilly wind blew through the gap. Yuden wished that she had worn warmer socks.

Ma'am Kusum, their teacher, welcomed them all to a brand new year of school. She had a kind, round face and a way of looking at them over the tops of her glasses that reminded Yuden of an owl. She decided at once that she liked Ma'am Kusum – much better than Sir Chencho whom they had in Class IV, who was rather stern. He once loudly told off Dawa for not doing her homework on time, and in front of everyone, which made her cry. Yuden had never really forgiven him for that (although she had secretly been quite relieved that she was not the one being shouted at).

“Right, everybody, get your pencils and notebooks out,” Ma'am Kusum announced and started writing sums on the blackboard.

Yuden suddenly remembered that in her rush to leave the house this morning, she'd forgotten to put her pencil case in her bag. Never mind, one of her friends would have a spare one.











“Pssst, Dawa... lend me one of your pencils, will you?”

Dawa rolled her eyes. “Yuden, you forgot your pencil case again? You’re always doing that!”  
So what? It’s not such a big deal, thought Yuden to herself. I can’t remember everything.

“Just give it to me,” she whispered.

Dawa reluctantly handed one over. “You’re so irresponsible,” she hissed. And for a minute, Yuden thought she looked exactly like Sir Chencho.

After maths was over, the children put their books away, and all stood up as the Headmaster strode into the room.

“Tomorrow we are going to hold an election\*,” he announced. “Each class will get to vote\*\* for the person you want to become your new Class Monitor.” The children all looked around at each other with bright eyes. Several hands shot up in the air. “Before you all get too excited, you have to think hard. The position of Class Monitor is very important. You must choose someone who will be kind, and fair, and will carry out the Class Monitor’s duties responsibly.”

An excited chattering broke out in the classroom as headmaster Yeshey had a quiet conversation with Ma’am Kusum. The other children were too busy talking to each other, but Yuden, who was nearest the door, overheard snatches of their conversation. They were both looking serious and worried, and kept looking at the broken door.

“...the chowkidar won’t be back for...”

“...cost so much? But can’t we...”

“...budget. I’m afraid you’ll have to...”

Yuden didn’t like to see Kusum Ma’am’s kind face look so worried, as she watched the headmaster leave. She wondered what to do.

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\* election: Process in which people vote to choose a person or group of people to hold an official position.

\*\* vote: To choose to give your support to someone, or something, rather than another.

## Bad News at Home

On the walk home that afternoon, everyone was talking about the election.

“I’m voting for Pema,” announced Dawa. “He always comes first.”

“It’s not about getting most marks, silly,” said Tshering. “Anyway, I think Thinley would be good. He’s captain of the football team, and I bet he could beat anyone at running.”

“What about Sonam? She’s sooooo pretty.”

Yuden barely heard them. She was staring at her feet as she walked, thinking about the spare planks of wood in the cowshed at home, and mentally comparing which bits might be the right size for the bottom of the classroom door. She woke out of her daydream when she heard her name being mentioned.

“Yes, we’ll all vote for Yuden,” a boy was saying, “.. If there’s the job of most absent- minded person in the whole world!” in a huff, and stared into the distance even harder.

Yuden was the first to reach the path to her home and ran all the way there.

She burst through the door. “Ama! Apa!” she started... but then stopped. Her parents were both sitting on the bed, looking very pale and worried.

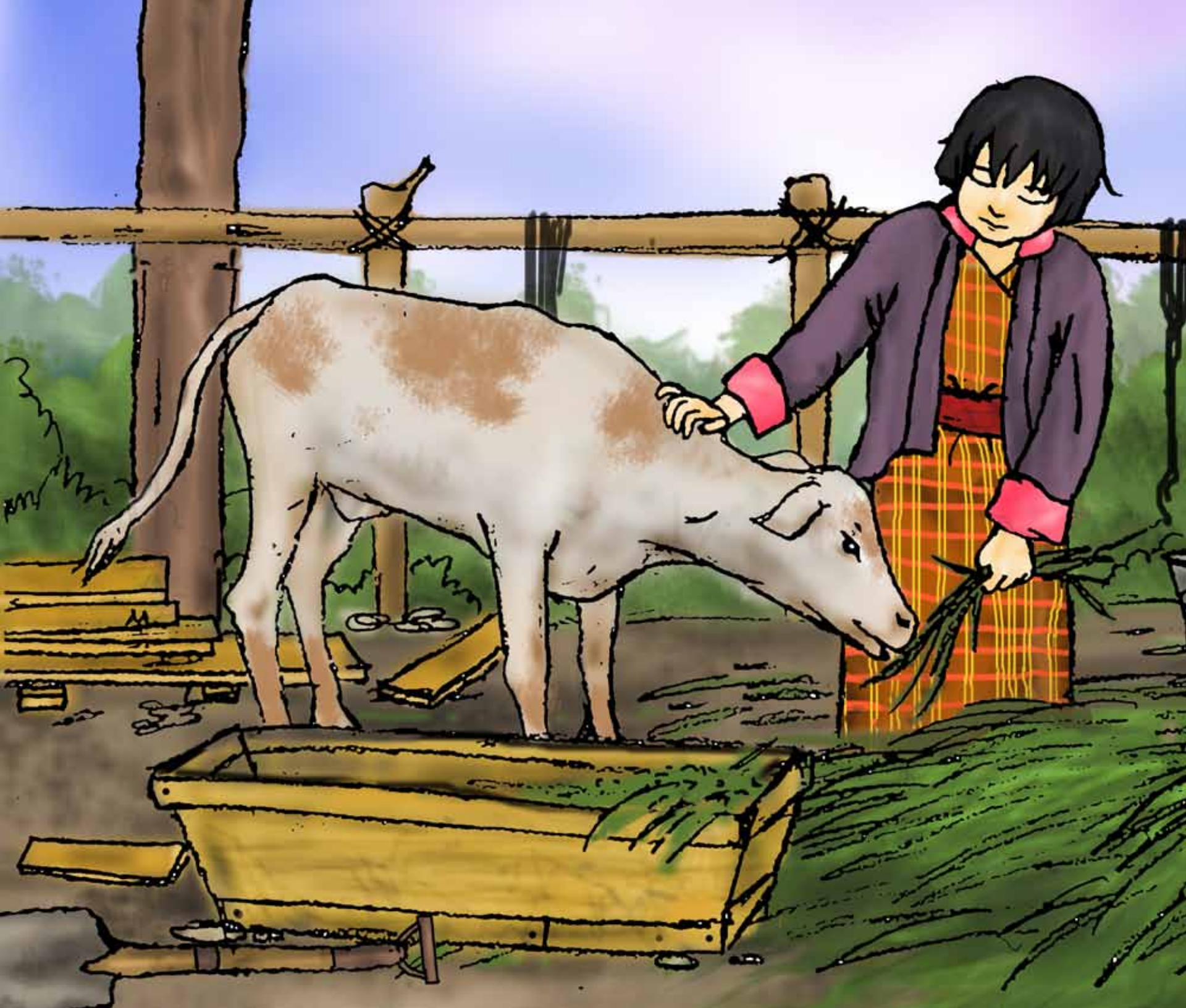
Ama held up her hand. “Shhhh,” she said. “Cheychey’s just fallen asleep.” Yuden walked quietly to the bedside and looked down at her little sister.















Zangmo was sleeping, but her face was flushed and sweating and she was breathing heavily, a little frown between her closed eyes.

Apa took Yuden's hand and led her to the door. "Cheychey's very sick," he explained, gently. "She has a fever, and we have to let her rest as much as possible."

Yuden suddenly felt really terrible. If she had only listened to Ama and not taken Zangmo out to play with her friends...

"Apa, I..." Yuden began, but just then Zangmo whimpered and started to wake up, and her father quickly went back to the bedside with a fresh towel to cool her forehead.

Her parents were busy, bending over the bed and talking to each other in low, worried voices. There was nothing that Yuden could do, so she wandered out to the cowshed. The little calf was there, and looked up at her expectantly with its long-lashed dark brown eyes. Yuden scratched its head, and the calf butted against her hand.

"Cheychey's really sick," Yuden explained to the calf, unhappily, "and it's all my fault." She gave the calf some feed, and watched as it munched away. Yuden sighed. Then she caught sight of some of the bits of wood stacked in one corner of the shed, and forgot everything else. There was one at the front that might just do...

## Who Let the Dogs in?

The next day dawned bright and cold, but Zangmo's forehead was still hot.

"If she's no better by this evening, we'll have to take her to the BHU\*" said Ama, worriedly.

"I'm sure she'll be fine by then," said Apa, putting his arm around her shoulders. "She's a strong little girl – a fighter – just wait and see."

Yuden wanted to believe him, but he sounded much more certain than he looked.

She tucked the small wooden plank under one arm, and made her way down to the path to school, pulling her tego close around her to keep out the cold wind.

When they got to their classroom – what a mess! The broken door couldn't be bolted properly and stray dogs had got in at night and overturned the dustbins. There were bits of paper and rubbish all over the floor, blown about by the cold wind that came in through the gap in the door.

Yuden rushed around picking up bits of paper. Dawa joined in, then Tshering, and some of the other kids, chasing bits of paper as they blew around, like it was a great game. Before long, all the rubbish had been collected, and put in the bin. They were just putting in the last stray scraps when Ma'am Kusum walked in.

The children all burst into loud chatter, explaining what had happened. She listened quietly to their explanations, and nodded.

Their classroom seemed even colder than outside. The wind whistled through the gap in the door and the children sat at their desks, shivering.

"Why can't they get the door fixed?" complained Sonam. "It's been like that since those silly boys kicked the football and broke it last term! And it's frreeeezing in here."

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\* Basic Health Unit







Just then, Ma'am Kusum walked in and the children all burst into loud chatter.

"It's so cold!"

"The door..."

She listened quietly to them, and then raised her hand.

"Well," Ma'am Kusum began to explain, "it's the chowkidar's responsibility to fix things like this, but his mother is ill and he's left for his village and won't be back for two weeks. The headmaster has written to the district education authorities, but we haven't heard anything from them yet, and the school just doesn't have enough money to replace the whole door, I'm afraid."

Yuden's hand shot up.

"Ma'am," she said. She reached down under her desk and pulled out the wooden plank that she had brought. "I think this is the right size," she said, hesitantly.

Ma'am Kusum frowned. "Well, that's very nice of you, Yuden," she said. "But we still need nails and a hammer, and I don't think..."

"My father has a hammer," piped up Sonam.

"... and I can run and get nails from the shop," said someone else.

Ma'am Kusum looked at all their eager faces uncertainly. "Well..." she hesitated.

"Oh, please let's try!" they cried.

"Yes, yes!"

"We can all fix it," said Yuden, "if we work together."

Ma'am Kusum suddenly seemed to make up her mind. "Very well then, Yuden, you and Sonam go to the headmaster's office and get his permission. If Yeshey Sir says yes, then this afternoon," she threw up her hands, "it's up to you!"

## Woodwork is Hard Work!

Yuden was nervous. She had never been to the headmaster's office before. Her heart beat a little faster as she got to the curtained doorway to the headmaster's room. Yuden and Sonam nudged each other to go in first. Finally, Yuden cleared her throat, knocked on the wooden doorframe, lifted the curtain and peeped into the room.

"Yes?" said headmaster Yeshey as he lifted his spectacles to the top of his head and looked up from the book on his desk. "What's the matter, girls? You're from Ma'am Kusum's class, aren't you?"

"Yes, Sir. My name is Yuden."

"And what's your name?" asked the headmaster.

"I am Sonam."

"Ma'am Kusum sent us to ask sir about our classroom's broken door la," said Yuden.

"The door's broken, sir, and it lets in the cold," said Sonam.

"And Sir, we're so cold we can't even hold our pencils and... and... and... we have to do something!" blurted out Yuden in a rush.

The headmaster took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "Yes, you're right," he said. "But we just don't have the funds at the moment... You'll just have to be patient."

"But, sir," piped up Sonam, "Yuden had a great idea. She's got a plank..."








Headmaster







“...and Sonam’s Apa has some tools and stuff, and...”

“...and we want to fix it ourselves,” they both ended together. “Can we, please?”

Headmaster Yeshey looked a bit startled.

“Well, we’re not running a carpentry school here, you know. But,” he hesitated, looking at their eager faces, “I suppose if you’re careful...”

“Las la! We will be!” said Yuden. “We’ll be really, really responsible.”

“Alright then,” said the headmaster, leaning back on his chair. “You may tell Ma’am Kusum that you have my permission to try.”

Yuden and Sonam walked quietly out of the door, but as soon as they were outside, hugged each other with excitement.

“Yay! We did it!” said Sonam.

“We’ve only got permission,” Yuden reminded her. “Now comes the hard part.” And the two children ran back to the classroom, hand in hand, to give the others the good news.

## The Great Door Project

The children wanted to start work straightaway, but Ma'am Kusum made them do a whole period of General Knowledge before they could get to the Great Door Project (as Yuden had started thinking of it).

Once they had finally packed away their boxes, the children turned to her with bright eyes. "Alright," she said, "Yuden – this was your idea. Where do you think we should start?"

Yuden looked rather flustered for a minute, with all her friends looking at her. It felt like she was in a bright spotlight on stage and had forgotten her lines. "Ummm, well, I think we'll need nails... about... er... this big?" she held her thumb and index finger out to show them.

"I'll get them!" volunteered Tshering.

"I've got some pocket money left over from the time my uncle visited us," said Dawa. "Will they be very expensive?" She held out her hand with a few ngultrum in it to Ma'am Kusum, whose eyes twinkled like she was trying not to laugh.

"I think that should be enough," she said, seriously.

Dawa and Tshering rushed off to the local shop to hunt for nails, while Sonam and Tobgay went to Sonam's house to see if they could borrow a hammer, and Yuden and the other children solemnly measured the hole with someone's pink plastic ruler and compared it with the plank.













“It’s a bit big,” said one kid.

“Better than too small,” retorted Yuden, slightly offended that her beautiful plank was being criticised.

“I think it’s just right,” said another, “but we’ll need to take these splintery bits off.”

Before long Sonam and Tobgay returned with not just a hammer, but a whole toolbox! Two of the kids got to work with some sandpaper making the wood smooth around the broken edges. And when Dawa and Tshering came back with the nails, they were ready for the final fitting.

Tobgay was chosen to do the hammering, since he was the strongest and was an excellent archer. “What’s that got to do with it?” muttered Dawa, pushing up his glasses. He really wanted to do the job himself. “He’s got really good aim,” said Yuden, pulling out a bent nail from the doorframe. “You’d probably bash your own thumb!”

Tobgay and Yuden set to work, while the others handed them tools as they asked for them. Within minutes, the door was neatly screwed back onto the frame and the gaping hole at the bottom was neatly covered with a nice, new plank.

“Yay, we’ve done it,” shouted Tobgay. The children were beaming with happiness as if they had solved the biggest maths problem of all time. Ma’am Kusum seemed the most pleased of all. She congratulated the children for taking on the responsibility of repairing the door instead of waiting for someone to come and fix the problem.

“Great job! You have all shown how initiative and cooperation is the first small step we can take to fix and solve our problems. The headmaster will be pleased. Your parents too,” said Ma’am Kusum.

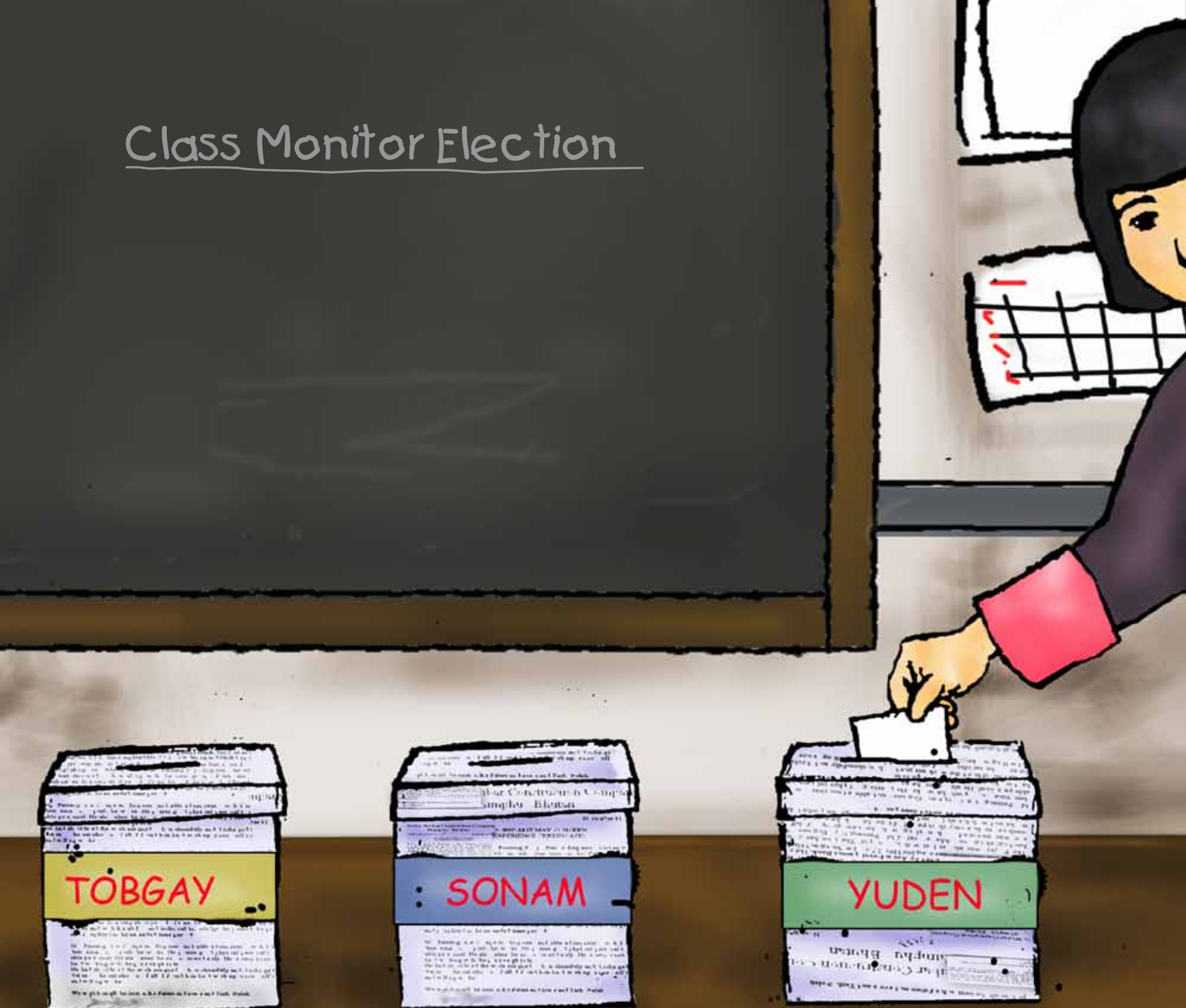
Parents! Home? In all the excitement of the afternoon, Yuden had forgotten about her little sister. Cheychey’s flushed face swam before her eyes, a lump came to her throat and she scarcely heard Ma’am Kusum dismiss the class, saying, “And remember – tomorrow have your votes ready for electing the Class Monitor,” as she ran for the door.







# Class Monitor Election







## The New Monitor

When she reached the house she saw her father standing out front. And before he even had a chance to say hello, she blurted out everything -- how she had ignored Ama's warning not to take Cheychee outside in the cold, and how they had played with Dawa's new skipping rope until the sun was almost set, and how it was all her fault, and she was really, really, really sorry, and she promised to be a better sister and more responsible from now on...

When Yuden stopped to breathe, Apa managed to get a word in edgewise. "But that's what I was coming out to tell you," he said. "Cheychee is much, much better -- what did I tell you? She's a little fighter, and I'm sure her immune system is even stronger now for having fought off the infection!" "Really?" Yuden's eyes were bright -- not with tears, but with relief and happiness.

All four of them slept deeply and well that night and Yuden skipped off happily to school in the morning. She was looking forward to voting for the Class Monitor, and had decided to vote for Tobgay: he was fair, and kind, and -- most importantly for their lively class -- had a loud voice to shut people up when they were all talking at once!

When all the children were settled, Ma'am Kusum shut the door with a very happy "clunk". With no cold wind blowing through the gap, it soon became nice and cosy in the classroom.

All the children had written the names of their chosen candidates\* on slips of paper and put them into a bowl. Ma'am Kusum solemnly took out

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\* candidate: A candidate is someone who is being considered for a position.

the slips one by one and sorted them into a pile. There was not a whisper or squeak in the classroom -- you could hear a pin drop, as the children held their breath.

“And the new Class Monitor for Class V is...” Ma’am Kusum looked up with a twinkle in her eye, “... Yuden Zangmo.”

Yuden couldn’t believe her ears!

The other children crowded around her, slapping her on the back. “We all voted for you,” said Sonam and the others. “Thanks to you, we’ve got a brand new door!”

“Remember, the higher your position in school or at home, the greater is your responsibility,” said Ma’am Kusum, pinning a “Monitor” badge on Yuden’s shirt. “And when you reach 18 years of age, you will get to vote for the leader you want for the whole country. That’s a responsibility for every single person in Bhutan.”

Well, that evening Yuden walked home like she was floating on air. She ran to hug her parents, and showed them her badge, proudly. She even took it off so that Cheychey could play with it.

“Well done,” said Ama. “The only thing that worries me is...”

Yuden looked anxious. “Yes?”

“Well... now you’re so big and responsible, maybe you’re too grown-up for ... this!”

And from behind her back she brought out a beautiful new skipping rope, with shiny red handles.

“Thank you!” cried Yuden, and rushed out of the door into the sunlight to find her friends, twirling the rope high into the air with joy.







## QUESTIONS:

- What does it mean to be responsible?
- Have you ever been given responsibility for something? What was that, and how did you feel about it?
- What do you think is the difference between ‘taking responsibility’ and ‘giving’ it?
- What does Yeshey Sir mean when he says that “the position of Class Monitor is very important.” Why does he want the children to think hard about who they want to vote for?
- Do you think that Yuden will make a good Class Monitor? Why?
- Is there such a thing as being ‘too responsible’?



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